

Watervliet Arsenal, Building 14
Watervliet Arsenal, Machine Rebuild Shop
South Broadway, on the Hudson River
Watervliet
Albany County
New York

HAER No. NY-218

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1-WAVL

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D C 20013-7127

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Building #14

The histories of buildings #14 and #105 are at times unclear, but by combining archaeological and archival data, it is possible to reconstruct, to some degree, the changes the buildings have undergone.

Building #14 is a two-story building that measures 395'2" in length and 49'10" in width. During the archaeological survey, it was observed that the brick pattern on the building's north and south ends varied slightly from the pattern in the center of the building. The entire building was laid in American bond, but while the north and south ends of the building were laid with four courses of stretchers to one course of headers, the middle third of the building was laid with five courses of stretchers to one course of headers. This change in brick pattern suggests that building #14 was constructed in three separate stages, each being approximately 133 feet in length. An 1845 map of the arsenal shows that the entire building was completed by that date. Several references to the construction of building #14 were found in an unpublished book of letters concerning the arsenal. The following quotes from that book, A History of Watervliet Arsenal, provide clues to actual construction dates of building #14.

A letter addressed to Colonel George Talcott in April 1843 states: "The timber shed to be built is precisely the same as that added last year, to the one built the year before, and will complete the building as originally designed."¹ This letter indicates that the last section of the building was completed in 1843 and that the other two sections were built in 1841 and 1842 respectively. Francis K. Kyle, who compiled "A History of Watervliet Arsenal, in listing the accomplishments of a Lt. Colonel R. L. Baker, notes that a "two-story brick shed for lumber storage, later converted in 1887 to a field and siege gun shop,"² was built. This reference to the building later being converted to a gun shop confirms that building #14 and the lumber shed are one and the same, since it is well documented that building #14 was converted in 1887 to a field and siege gun shop.

In 1887, it was decided that an Army gun factory should be established at the Watervliet Arsenal. Some of the reasons for choosing Watervliet over other arsenals were mentioned in a report by the United States Army Ordnance Department in 1876:

1. Health - Watervliet has a "more rigorous climate" and is not as "subject to epidemics";³
2. Safety from hostile operations - Wateryliet is "absolutely safe from hostile fleets and vessels";⁴
3. Labor - Watervliet has access to the "highly skilled mechanics of New England," and is less subject to labor troubles and "attacks by hostile mobs";⁵

4. Transportation - Watervliet has "excellent water connections," and "excellent railroad connections";⁶
5. Foundations - Watervliet has "a shale foundation at a shallow depth,"⁷ that provide solid foundations for the buildings and heavy machineries; and
6. Buildings - Watervliet has "west of the canal two brick timber storehouses susceptible for conversion to good shops for heavy work."⁸

The conversion of building #14 into a gun shop required major renovation, at a cost of \$20,000.⁹ While there are no visible indications of this renovation on the exterior of the building, the interior had to be remodeled to accommodate the shrinkage pit used in the manufacture of cannons.

The last major alteration of building #14 occurred in 1920 when the roof of the building was elevated approximately five feet, so that cranes could be used inside the building. This structural change is visible from the outside of the building (photographs 1, 2, 3). It is easily seen that the bricks of the addition are of a different color than those of the original building. The bricks from the elevated section are machine-made, and the brick patterning is different.

Only two other architectural changes have occurred on the exterior of the building. Along the east wall, five of the arched windows have been filled in (photograph 3). Also along the east wall, a doorway has been modified. This modification is also visible from the brickwork pattern (photograph 4).